



DIVISION OF HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES

www.doh.sd.gov

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Community Health Services
Disease Prevention
Family Health
Health Promotion
State Epidemiologist

BIOTERRORISM Fact Sheet

Office of Disease Prevention

(605) 773-3737

1-800-592-1861 in South Dakota only

This material is provided for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical care. We are not able to answer personal medical questions. Please see your health care provider concerning appropriate care, treatment or other medical advice.

What is bioterrorism?

Bioterrorism involves the intentional or threatened uses of viruses, bacteria, fungi, toxins from living organisms, or chemicals, to produce death or disease in humans, animals, or plants. Bioterrorism is always a criminal act.

What is the risk?

There is a low risk of a bioterrorism attack, moderate risk for bioterrorism threats, but there would be severe consequences if an event did occur.

Where is the threat?

Internationally, rogue nations and political terrorists who have the capability and the will to use bioweapons are the most likely groups expected to commit bioterrorism.

Domestically, religious groups, anti-government groups, groups who want to make a statement about perceived wrongs or to demonstrate independence or individuals who are emotionally disturbed are those who are most likely to commit acts of bioterrorism.

What are the agents of most concern?

Many biological agents could be used to make weapons, however most experts agree that only a limited number of well-known biological agents would cause widespread illness and death. Those agents most likely to be used as weapons are:

- Bacillus anthracis — the causative agent of [anthrax](http://doh.sd.gov/DiseaseFacts/anthrax.aspx).
<http://doh.sd.gov/DiseaseFacts/anthrax.aspx>
- Brucella species — the causative agent of [brucellosis](http://doh.sd.gov/DiseaseFacts/Brucellosis.aspx).
<http://doh.sd.gov/DiseaseFacts/Brucellosis.aspx>
- Clostridium botulinum — the causative agent of [botulism](http://doh.sd.gov/DiseaseFacts/Botulism.aspx).
<http://doh.sd.gov/DiseaseFacts/Botulism.aspx>
- Yersinia pestis — the causative agent of [plague](http://doh.sd.gov/DiseaseFacts/Plague.aspx).
<http://doh.sd.gov/DiseaseFacts/Plague.aspx>
- Francisella tularensis — the causative agent of [tularemia](http://doh.sd.gov/DiseaseFacts/tularemia.aspx).
<http://doh.sd.gov/DiseaseFacts/tularemia.aspx>
- Variola — the virus that causes smallpox, an infection eradicated from the globe.
- Viral hemorrhagic fevers such as Ebola, Marburg, and Lassa fever.

How would biological agents be spread?

Biological weapons could be spread through contamination of food or water or by inhalation of fine-particle aerosols.

Either way would be effective, however aerosols would be a more effective way to disseminate a large quantity of agent capable of causing mass casualties in an area.

How will bioterrorism be detected?

An announced event (terrorist group announces their intent or deed) will be evaluated at the time by primary health care providers, public health and law enforcement. An unannounced event will be detected by private health care providers, infection control and/or public health surveillance as an unusual disease or death occurrence, once the disease starts to manifest itself in the victims. Prompt recognition and reporting is important to prevent spread and control future cases. Call 1-800-592-1861 or 1-605-773-3536 immediately to report unusual illness or unexplained death.